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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8866
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 2870
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2239
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1894
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 5165
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 2101
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5372
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8965
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE 0732
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6541
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 1755
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 2126
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 0603
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2359
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 4370
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000221

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS; INR/EAP; OES
PACOM FOR FPA;
TREASURY FOR OASIA:SCHUN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/09/2019
TAGS: [SENV](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [PGOV](#) [BM](#)
SUBJECT: BURMA: NGO WORKING TO PROTECT TIGER POPULATION

REF: 07 RANGOON 755

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Classified By: Economic Officer Samantha A. Carl-Yoder for Reasons 1.4
(b and d).

Summary

[¶1.](#) (C) American NGO Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) continues to work with the Burmese government to protect Burma's dwindling tiger population. While the GOB established the world's largest tiger reserve in the Hukong Valley in 2004, it has yet to approve a WCS petition to expand the protected area an additional 6,000 square miles. Instead, the GOB in 2007 granted two crony companies the right to develop part of this potential expanded reserve for biofuel production. While these agricultural projects have yet to threaten the tiger population, WCS fears they may have a long-term impact. Therefore the organization continues to push the GOB to improve conservation efforts. End Summary.

Fewer than 200 Tigers Remain

[¶2.](#) (SBU) The Bengal tiger, a symbol of national pride, once roamed freely throughout Burma. However, over the past fifty years, Burma's tiger population has declined dramatically due to deforestation, depletion of its prey, poaching, and a diminishing gene pool. The Burmese Government estimates there are approximately 1,000 tigers living in the wild;

however, American NGO Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), which began working with the GOB in 1999 to detect, monitor, and protect the dwindling tiger population, claims there are fewer than 200 tigers in Burma. Most of Burma's tigers live in two areas -- in the Hukong Valley tiger reserve in Kachin State and in Tanintharyi Division in southeastern Burma. According to WCS Country Director Than Myint, small populations of tigers such as those found in Burma are more likely to die out than large ones because of the lack of genetic diversity.

Securing Tiger Habitats

¶3. (C) Over the past ten years, WCS and the Ministry of Forestry have worked to locate Burmese tiger populations. WCS surveys identified a "vibrant population" of approximately 100 tigers living in the Hukong Valley. Additionally, WCS estimates there are more than 50 tigers living in insurgent-controlled areas of Tanintharyi Division. Due to political difficulties, WCS and the Ministry of Forestry have been unable to secure an agreement with the insurgent groups, specifically the Karen National Union, to protect this tiger population, Than Myint explained. Consequently, WCS and the GOB have focused their efforts on the Hukong Valley.

¶4. (C) In 2004, the GOB established a 2,500 square mile tiger reserve in the Hukong Valley and pledged to protect the habitat from deforestation and poachers. Than Myint reports that the Ministry of Forestry's Conservation Department, which is severely underfunded, only has 25 full-time forest

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rangers patrolling the area. WCS funds an additional 30 rangers during the dry season (October through May) to help protect the tiger population. (Note: Most WCS rangers are farmers who return home during the rainy season to harvest and plant crops.) Than Myint noted that the patrols have reduced the amount of deforestation in the protected area. In 2004, the Ministry of Forestry outlawed Myanmar Timber Enterprise (a state-owned enterprise) from felling trees in the area and WCS has not observed any private companies harvesting trees in the reserve. Than Myint noted that some degradation of the land does still occur as local communities cut timber for firewood and home construction. This degradation is minimal, and WCS has no evidence that it negatively affects the tiger population, Than Myint stated.

¶5. (C) With so few forest rangers, WCS and the GOB are unable to guarantee an end to tiger poaching in the area. However, Than Myint explained that there are signs of tiger reproduction. During the next year, WCS hopes to shoot footage of tiger cubs. Than Myint believes that if the Ministry has proof the tiger population is increasing, it will allocate additional funds to tiger conservation.

Promoting Biofuels instead of Conservation?

¶6. (C) WCS found evidence in 2006 that tigers live beyond the protected area in the Hukong Valley and requested the Ministry of Forestry to expand the tiger reserve area to cover an additional 6,000 square miles in Kachin State. While the Ministry of Forestry supports the proposal, the senior generals have yet to agree. Than Myint believes several senior generals are more concerned with promoting agriculture and biofuel development in the proposed area than they are with conservation. Indeed, the GOB in July 2007, provided two crony companies -- Yuzana Co. Ltd. and Jadeland Enterprises -- with approximately 200,000 acres of land for biofuel development (reftel). To date, Yuzana and Jadeland have only developed 10,000 acres, and WCS has no evidence that these companies' operations are threatening the tiger populations. Nevertheless, WCS remains concerned that, as the companies develop more land and build new roads and

biofuel plants, they will encroach on areas where tigers and their prey live. WCS continues to push the GOB to protect the area. Former WCS President and Bronx Zoo expert Alan Rabinowitz plans to visit Burma in July to meet with GOB officials regarding the proposed expansion of the Hukong reserve.

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